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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000239

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: "THE STREET IS STRONGER THAN PARLIAMENT:" SADRIST  
VOWS OPPOSITION TO LTSR

REF: BAGHDAD 103 (SADRIST ON IRAN INFLUENCE)

Classified By: PolCounselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: As a harbinger of Sadrism Trend hostility to a prospective USG-GOI long-term strategic relationship (LTSR) agreement, Sadrism Deputy Governor of Karbala Jawad al-Hasnawi told us January 24 that if Trend efforts to quash parliamentary approval of the agreement were to fail (a highly unlikely event in his view), the Sadristists would lead Iraq's Shia masses into the streets in enraged protest, an action that Hasnawi guaranteed would doom ratification "because the street is stronger than the Council of Representatives." He warned that Moqtada al-Sadr is serious about lifting his freeze on Sadrism militia operations unless the GOI stops attacking and arresting Sadrism loyalists. Hasnawi acknowledged splits within the Sadrism movement and predicted even more division as provincial and national elections draw closer, but said the Trend would remain strong. When asked for a ten-year outlook for the Trend and Iraq, Hasnawi said the most likely scenario would be an Iraq ruled not by the Sadristists but by a "Persian dictatorship" headed by Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, who would act as Tehran's puppet. He claimed he met in Jordan last week with a representative of UNSYG Ban Ki Moon about convening a conference under UN auspices in Morocco within the next two months with the real but undeclared purpose of providing a forum in which senior Sadristists and USG officials could meet far from Iraq and media glare to discuss the future of Iraq. He said Moqtada was aware of his contact with the UN and posed no objections. End Summary.

Taking It To The Street

¶2. (C) Hasnawi and fellow Sadrism Trend official Ghalib al-Dami claimed that Sadristists would actively oppose ratification of any GOI-USG agreement that permits an open-ended American military presence in Iraq, stating that the Trend insists on a date certain for departure of all foreign forces. "Even if it is ten years from now, we want a timetable and deadline." Hasnawi sneered that there is no need for training of Iraqi Security Forces because "after all the wars we have been through, Iraqis are militaristic people who already know how to fight." Waving off our arguments that stability and resulting economic benefits would flow from such an agreement, he predicted that any agreement would not be ratified by the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR). He claimed that 150 of the CoR's 275 members and an overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people were already opposed to the agreement in principle and that their ranks would swell as other members became aware that the agreement was "a deal against Iraq's interests between the Americans and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Dawa Party, and the Kurds."

¶3. (C) When asked what the Trend would do if an absolute majority of CoR members ratified the agreement over Trend

objections, Hasnawi replied without hesitation that Sadrists would lead street protests against the agreement until the agreement was dropped: he guaranteed that Sadrist street action would end the matter "because the street is stronger than the Council of Representatives." When we pointed out that this sort of conduct does not comport with the democratic process, Hasnawi shot back that CoR action that does not reflect the will of the people is "false democracy."

He and al-Dami gratuitously advised us to avoid this outcome by bypassing the GOI and negotiating an agreement directly with the CoR, which he claimed might be amenable to a deal if it included a date certain for departure of foreign troops. Better yet, they intoned, wait until a new CoR is elected and negotiate a deal with them because the new CoR will better reflect the Iraqi people (Hasnawi previously predicted significant Sadrist Trend gains at ISCI and Dawa expense in future provincial and national elections). Undeterred by our contrary interjections, al-Dami chimed in that talk of the agreement only confirms that the USG never intends to depart Iraq, a view he claimed is supported by media statements of various American politicians who reportedly said the U.S. presence in Iraq will be similar in duration and scope to that in Germany, Japan and South Korea.

Lifting the JAM Freeze?

14. (C) With regard to a recent warning by Sadrist Trend spokesman Salah al-Obaidi that Moqtada al-Sadr is mulling over an end to his six-month "freeze" on Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) operations, Hasnawi said Sadr is angry and frustrated over an ongoing GOI crackdown on Sadr loyalists in several south-central provinces. Claiming that senior Sadrist officials - but not Moqtada himself - have spoken several

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times to Prime Minister Maliki about Trend concerns, Hasnawi blurted that "we talk and talk but no one seems to listen." He claimed he had complained directly to a senior advisor of the GOI Minister of Interior who replied that many Iraqi Police brigades are controlled not by the MOI but by ISCI/Badr, particularly in Karbala, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah.

Apart from those areas, Hasnawi said relations between GOI security forces and Sadrists were good in Wasit, Najaf, and Maysan provinces. Relations in Babil province had been smooth until Police Chief Qais al-Mamuri was assassinated ("he was a very good man") but have since deteriorated after an ISCI/Badr cadre assumed the post, while in "the Iranian city of Basrah," police still attack Sadrists and Fadhlila. Hasnawi noted that Sadrist patience is running out and claimed Moqtada's threat to lift the freeze should be taken seriously.

15. (C) When asked whether Coalition Force activity is a factor in Sadr's freeze decision, Hasnawi said it is less important than GOI crackdowns because Sadrists view the latter as veiled attacks by ISCI/Badr, a more hated enemy than the U.S. He said the purpose of the freeze - to identify, isolate, and expel Iranian loyalists within Sadrist ranks - is being achieved partially "because you are attacking the Iranian agents." He added that when the Coalition performs an operation in Sadr City, it can assess whether it has attacked a true Sadr loyalist or an Iranian agent acting under Sadrist guise by the degree of resistance to the attack by Sadr City residents and the degree of subsequent Sadrist protest against the attack. Hasnawi said the Trend has formed committees to expel disloyal elements, but he was evasive when asked about the manner and consequences of expulsion.

Trend Dynamics

16. (C) Frequently straying into extended anti-Iran jags, Hasnawi said Iran has found it easy to exploit Iraq's stagnant economy and high unemployment to recruit Sadrists

for training in Iran, followed by payment of a USD 300 per month salary. Upon return to Iraq, the recruits are ordered to perform three sorts of tasks in descending order of priority: battle Coalition Forces, thus fulfilling the short-term Iranian goal of "turning Iraq into a battlefield and trap for the Americans"); fighting GOI security forces; and killing educated Iraqis and society leaders, thus fulfilling the long-term Iranian goal of weakening Iraqi society to make it subservient to Tehran. He recounted a recent trip he made to Iran in which an Iranian government trade official confessed that Tehran pursues a policy of subsidizing exports of agricultural and consumer products to Iraq in an effort to undercut Iraqi costs of production, drive Iraqi producers out of business, and increase Iraqi dependence of Iran. The Sadrists are convinced that ISCI and Dawa are in cahoots with Iran in this plan, he claimed, and American failure to stop Iran has led many Iraqis to believe that Iran and the USG have made some sort of deal on Iraq, an assertion we immediately rebutted.

17. (C) According to Hasnawi, decision-making within the Sadrist Trend consists of a "three step process" in which issues are funneled first through a relevant subject matter committee (for example, he listed a 7-person political committee headed by Luway Shumays, a fatwa committee, a military committee, a women's committee, and a social affairs and services committee), and then through two layers of senior advisors who "filter" and frame matters for Moqtada's exclusive decision. In this manner, Hasnawi claimed, all competing views are heard and considered prior to decision. He acknowledged personal awareness of growing divisions within the trend "because Adnan Shahmani and other people who want to start a new group always approach me and ask me to join them." He downplayed the significance of such splinter groups, particularly Shahmani's National Gathering movement, stating that the splits would weaken those who left but not the Trend itself. He predicted that there would be more such splits in advance of future elections as people scramble for power and spoils. He clarified that he is not among the seven political committee members, but rather is close to them and other senior Sadr advisors.

18. (C) Hasnawi asserted that the Trend has offices throughout Iraq and recently asked Sunni Anbar Awakening leader Ahmed Abu Risha for permission to open branch offices in Ramadi and Salah Al-Din province. In addition, it maintains offices in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Kuwait, and Iran, and receives funding from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf sources. He denied that the Trend receives funds from Iran. When asked to provide a ten-year outlook for the Sadrist Trend, Hasnawi replied that Sadrists face a powerful, well-armed, and well-financed enemy in ISCI/Badr, who act on Iran's behalf. He said the most

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likely scenario in ten years would be an Iraq ruled not by the Sadrists but by a "Persian dictatorship" headed by ISCI boss Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, who would act as Tehran's tool. Hasnawi further stated that the USG's apparent inability to discern that ISCI is Tehran's main agent gives further credence to American-Iranian conspiracy theories among the public, adding that "since nobody in the Trend has been talking to you until now, our fear of this has grown." Al-Dami implored that "if you can't be fair to us, at least be neutral."

Possible UN Meeting?  
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19. (C) Hasnawi claimed he had met in Jordan last week with UN official Jamal Ben Omar, a Moroccan national who Hasnawi said is a representative of UNSYG Ban Ki Moon. Hasnawi said the talks focused on convening a conference under UN auspices in Morocco within the next two months: while the conference's nominal agenda would be focus on the Sadrist Trend, the real but undeclared purpose would be to provide a forum in which Sadrist and USG officials could meet far from Iraq and media

glare to discuss the future of Iraq. He claimed Moqtada al-Sadr was aware of his contact with the UN and posed no objections.

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